

**Testimony Supporting**  
**HB 5290: An act increasing financial assistance for grandparents and other nonparent**  
**relatives who are raising children**

Grace Felten  
Aging Committee  
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Senator Flexer, Representative Serra, distinguished members of the Aging Committee:

I am here as a citizen of Connecticut, in support of House Bill 5290 to better support grandparents and other relatives who have taken on the enormous emotional and financial responsibilities of raising children when the parents are unable.

I think we can all agree that keeping children with relatives and caregivers who love them, and have been invested in their lives, is in the best interest of the child. In fact, as Joette Katz, Commissioner of DCF, stated in a 2012 memo, “Experience and research indicate that the quality of family participation is the single most important factor in the success of our work.”<sup>1</sup> Common sense tells us that keeping children in the care of those who love them, can keep them safe, and are willing to take on this responsibility is always the best solution. A home where a child is loved is irreplaceable. In addition to this common sense judgement, research informs us that children in kinship care have significantly better outcomes than those who are placed in non-relative foster care. National research indicates that kinship care creates more stable homes, siblings are less likely to be separated, temporary guardians are often willing to become permanent guardians if needed, and the children are just as safe as when they are in unrelated foster families.<sup>2</sup> In a study on children specifically in Connecticut, it has been found that when placed in kinship care children switch homes less frequently. This is important because children that switch homes tend to experience more trauma and have more behavioral difficulties.<sup>3</sup>

However, we also know that grandparents and other relatives are consistently facing more difficult situations than standard foster care families. They tend to be older, in poorer health, and are often struggling financially. They are many times on fixed incomes and most likely have not planned for the financial responsibilities of raising a child. Yet even with these obstacles, children are found to have more successful outcomes.<sup>4</sup> By DCF giving grandparents and other nonparent relatives serving as legal guardians seventy-five percent of the applicable monthly foster care rate, it increases the chance that these family members will be able to care for the child. It would be tragic to have to remove a child from a loving home with relatives to place

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<sup>1</sup> See Joette Katz’s memo, “Transforming the response to reports of abuse and neglect”, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF). *We all need somebody: Supporting children, families and the workforce in Connecticut’s family foster care system report*. 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

them with strangers in foster care because the state was supporting those foster care families more. It does not make sense financially or for the child.

We must also consider the reality that the majority of children involved with DCF are involved because of issues related to poverty, not abuse or intentional neglect. Fifty-nine percent of children are maltreated because of neglect as opposed to only ten percent for abuse.<sup>5</sup> This is especially relevant because the definition for neglect and that for poverty are closely related. Connecticut defines neglect as “the failure, whether intentional or not, of the person responsible for the child’s care to provide and maintain adequate food, clothing, medical care, supervision and/or education”<sup>6</sup>

With many children and their families already facing the obstacles of poverty, we need to implement the least intrusive intervention when faced with issues in the home. We also need to understand that grandparents and other relatives struggle more than typical foster families. Allowing children to be taken care of by those who love them will create the least traumatic option at this difficult time. The state is already committed to a kinship model. Now we need to take it a step further and make sure that all of our policies best support kinship care financially. Rather than put children and families through traumatic and costly proceedings to secure a foster family, we should provide grandparents and other related legal guardians seventy-five percent of the applicable monthly foster care rate.

Bills with a similar sentiment as to this one have gone before the state legislature in the past. **Please consider enacting HB 5290 to give grandparents and family members the support they need to maintain the responsibility of raising the children they love. It is best for the children and their families, and it is likely the most cost effective solution for the state of Connecticut.**

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<sup>5</sup> See, Casey Family Services, *Connecticut Department of Children and Families Differential Response*. 2010.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*